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ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTION OF SARAH AND HANK DAVIS

INTERVIEWER – EVELYN MC CLURE

Conversation begins:

EM Your were telling me that you went to a one room school, where did you go to school

SD In Sisque Co., I was born by Oroville. My folks had malaria and didn't want to raise their kids where there was so much malaria.

EM How did they get malaria?

SD My dad worked in a dredger pond and there's a lot of water. At that time there was a lot of malaria in the valley. So my dad and mother both had it and they didn't want their six kids to get it. So they moved up the Sisque Co. We had a ranch up there. We went to a school in Calavera about two miles from home. We hiked to school at first then dad fixed us up a wagon to get us to school.

We had a teacher who was part Indian I guess, Mr. Hasper. We didn't have art supplies so she showed us how to make baskets. I have no idea how she learned it or where she came from, but she was a great teachers. She would read us stories to start the day. She was a good teacher, that how the baskets started.

EM Did you go through the eighth grade?

SD No I went to four grades there. Then my sister was ready for high school and no way to get there so we moved to Etna. And that's were finished school, through high school. In the mean time after then I made baskets. There's a women here, I don't remember her name, she showed us how to make pioneer baskets. The one up there was the one I made that I never gave away. She used fancy stitches, I didn't like those fancy stitches. The teacher was a Native American, I can't remember her name. It was about 15 years and I thought I would take it up again, so I collected up pine needles and started making baskets again. I must have made 50 baskets gave most of them away to my kids.

EM When you first started in grade school, where did the materials come from?

SD I had raffia. You can get it at any craft shop. They've had that available for 30 years or so.

EM When you first started did you do stitching? Is that how it's done?

SD When she taught us how to do it we had a ring to start with. When I started doing it again I just took the raffia and started tying knots. Then take the raffia and start weaving around and around and around. Then you run out of raffia at that point you start adding pine needles.

EM Pine needles start or form the base?

SD I use a large eyed needle like the women used.

EM You did it a long time.

SD I started in grade school. I started again maybe 30 years later. And started again, like others will take up crochet or knitting. I made all my own designs. I used Indian designs for some of them, but I never really copied Indian baskets because I think you really need to be Indian to make Indian baskets. I never learned to make a twine basket, because I didn't have the materials I needed to make them. I would love to be able to make a twine basket.

EM I don't understand what you do here and twining

SD These are coil and very common in southwest Indian basket and go twice as face as a twine basket.

EM Is twine where you get a lot of leaders out of a base?

SD Yes, and then you twist your stems or roots. And then you use bark to synch to put it together.

It's hard to get materials now to make the twin baskets.

EM When did you come to Sebastopol?

SD In 1940. Hank and I were married by then. We'd gone to Chico State College and that's were we'd met and where we were married. Then he took a year and taught in Oakland. I graduated in before he did and moved to Oakland where he substituted and then he decided to go back to school. So we went to Corvales, OR State where he got a masters degree. And then we came to Sebastopol.

EM Did you teach too?

SD No, but I do have a teaching degree. I served on the So. Co. School board for 13 years, but I never taught.

EM What years were you on the school board?

SD 1952-1969, 13 years. I quite in 1969, so subtract the years. 1956 – 1969. I was on the first elected board, all the previous boards had been voted.. I was elected 3 times, then Hank was going to retire and I didn't want to have to go to board meeting.

EM What made you do that? Go back to the board?

SD Do I have to tell you that?

EM Only if you want to.

SD We had a facalty wives group, who there was one teachers wife who was always sarcastic. Dr. Sherriff came to one of our meetings and where talking about the school board elections. And she very saracticlly said, Sarah why don't you run for that? And she knew darn good and well I wouldn't get electiced. So some of the others said why don't you, so I did. And I was elected. But it was very interesting and I learned a lot.

EM You were on the board when the Green Valley School District lapsed.

SD Yes, there were a lot of schools in trouble then. The Watson School lapsed when I was on the board. The county had the control to set policy but no way to enforce it. They were able to control the school finances but as far as running the classroom they had no authority.

EM What did Hank teach at the high school?

SD He taught from 1940 – 1972, he taught AG Mechanics, Eletronicts – Radio, and Auto Mechanics Theory.

EM Do they still have those classes at Analy?

SD I don't' think so, I'm not sure they still have an AG Mechanics. They talk Future Farmers, but I'm not sure what they have over there now.

EM How did you decide to come to Sebastopol?

SD That was right at the end of the depression, at the end of WWII. And we had a list of available places for teachers. We interviewed at many schools. Tomales was paying $1200 per year, Analy was paying $1700 per year. So we went to Analy.

EM Have you always lived in this house?

SD No we lived in a couple of houses in Seb. Then the war came along and they needed teachers for bus drivers. The house we had been living in on Main Street had been sold. Hank was going to drive the junior bus, so we moved to Monte Rio. We lived in Monte Rio until 1945, just before the war ended. We moved into this house in 1945, on our second sons birthday. I can't belive it's that long, 55 years??

EM Were there many houses in this area then?

SD There were a few houses around us. We had an acrea. It was a lot of orchard property.

EM How many children do you have?

SD Two. I stayed home and took care of the kids and most of the neighborhood kids. Hanks didn't want me to work out of the house, he wanted me to be home when the kids got home.

EM Where there a lot of groups that you belonged to? Mothers clubs, PTA?

SD PTS, I belonged to the Methodists Church.

EM Did the PTA do a lot of activities?

SD They had big clothes closets. Mothers would bring in good children's clothing. Things were kind of tough then in the late 1940's.

EM So you did sewing over the years.?

SD I didn't do it all, but I did sew all the men's shirts and kids shirts. Now I can't even see to thread a needle.

EM I see you have a big magnifying glass.

SD That's the only way I can read. I subscribe to talking books to the blind. I have a special machine to play those tapes. I like fiction or most any type of books.

EM I was thinking if I can think of anything else I can ask you about your baskets. So once you got the basic instruction you went off on your own and did your own thing.

SD Yeah, figuring how to put the design on was challenging. I just fiddled with it so you have it spaced around. Hank always said you have to have an uneven number of motive. Most of mine are five. The way I finally figured out to

divide it and space around the rim of the basket the number of pictures I wanted and then I would make it on a piece of graph paper. Then I would mark it around until I had the right number for the size of the basket. That's how I did it.

EM Did the native person you learned from tell you about making patterns?

SD No.

EM Did she go into any Indian lore, because it's a very spiritual thing?

SD No. The books I have just tell about basket making. It's hard to find pine needle that will work, because they have to be at least 6" long. And most of the pine needles around here are short needled. I had to scrounge in the mountains for them. You can use digger pine needles, which are really long but they are small in diameter so you need 3 times as many. But they don't have the smell that will last. Some of these baskets still have the good pine smell, they never go out. Those Ponderosa or Jeffery pines.

EM What made you decided size wise what size you wanted to make?

SD It takeS quite awhile to make one, so when I get the bottom to a size

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